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BROWSINGS IN BOOKLAND

THE other day the New York papers announced the death of a local politician of small note named Joseph Shannon. To the bookish world this would not appear to be an item of news worth noticing, but as a matter of fact it is of some interest. There are a great many collectors, especially in this city, who treasure sets of Valentine's Manuals. These pudgy little volumes, fattened up with maps and pictures of the New York of the past, have no literary merit. They are, however, the most valuable published records which we have of the history of Manhattan Island, and they grow more rare and valuable year by year. My own set of the Manuals is still incomplete, and I find ever greater difficulties in filling the gaps as time goes on. The compiler of these curious works was neither a profound antiquarian nor a great scholar. He was, when I knew him, in his old age, a venerable gentleman devoted heart and soul to local history, and a true grubber out of every odd and end of information concerning it. The inestimable value of his work grows more apparent as we leave the New York of the past farther and farther behind us, and the monuments in the city's history vanish before the progress of commercial iconoclasm.

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It may seem a long cry from the City Hall to Bookland, but collectorship is full of such little romances. David T. Valentine, who compiled these Manuals, was clerk of the common council, or in the vulgate the board of aldermen of New York City, during many years, while this body was composed of the most responsible and respectable citizens of the town. At that time the city library, which has now been practically gutted, contained many books and other material bearing on the history of New York. It adjoined the aldermanic chamber, where Mr. Valentine attended to his clerical duties. Being of a natural inclination towards local research, he soon after his appointment commenced to delve among the treasures of the now depleted shelves. If I am not mistaken he once acted as librarian. Anyhow, in 1841 he commenced to publish his Manuals. The volumes opened with a regular recapitulation of the ordinances, statutes, reports, lists of members of the city government, etc. After these came innumerable papers of the greatest historical importance from a local standpoint, some written by the editor, some compiled from old newspapers and the like, and some contributed by antiquarians who had made a study of the Manhattan of the past. Whenever the editor discovered an interesting old view or chart, he had it lithographed or engraved. He had sketches made of existing landmarks, which are all we now have to show us what the New York of half a century ago was like. He lived only for his Manual, and each issue of it was a museum of curious interest. The entire collection, from 1841 to 1867, is a mine of nuggets for the student and the writer. Out of the material he gathered, the editor also made up a history of New York in two volumes, which was published in 1853-6.

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And now we get back to the connection between Joseph Shannon who died over in Mulberry street and Clerk Dryasdust Valentine. In 1868 the famous raid of the Tweed ring on the city treasury was planned. David T. Valentine, as chief clerk of the board of aldermen, stood in the way. One of his duties was to keep the seal of the city, and his signature was necessary to complete the action of the board. Tweed knew very well that he would not connive at the robberies for which the board was packed and primed, so he removed him, and made Shannon, who had been an alderman for several years, clerk in his place. Shannon got out three volumes of the Manual, in 1868-9-'70, but they were miserable affairs and of no value in the collection.

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Henry Sothoran & Co. must have made a neat plum out of the transfer of the Spencer library. Their manager, Railton, it was who negotiated the sale to Mrs. Rylands. Mrs. Rylands had been collecting books for several years, in order to stock the memorial library to her husband, which she was building in Manchester. Sothoran & Co. had done much of her buying for her. As soon as their manager heard that the Althorp library was in the market, he got an option on it from Lord Spencer's agents, and pressed its importance upon the Manchester widow. He showed her how completely it would crown her work and render her memorial to her husband one of the great libraries of the world, should she secure the whole collection. As usual, the Flying Scotchman proved worthy of his title.

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Probably no one could be more surprised at the use made of his money than the man in whose behalf this magnificent business transaction was concluded. John Rylands was a typical Manchester money grubber. He had no soul outside his immense

business, which he had built up from nothing. It seems a real sarcasm that this haberdasher, who never had a literary thought in his life, who existed in his warehouse like a spider in its den, spreading his web-like network of trade over all the United Kingdom, should be commemorated by having one of the great book collections of the world rechristened in his honor. But so this waggish old world of ours reverses the condition of things. John Rylands died about three years back. He was eighty years of age, and imbecile, but he maintained to the last the idea that he could manage his business himself. Every morning at 9 o'clock he entered his office. He read his letters, studied reports, issued commands which were generally discreetly disregarded, and having thoroughly enjoyed himself all day went home to tea. One morning when the shadow at the end was drawing very near he was driven down to the place as usual. On being helped out, he stared up at the palatial offices carrying the proud legend "Rylands" engraved on their front. "No, no, no, no!" he said pettishly, turning to re-enter the carriage, "I want to go to my own place." Across the waste of years there had suddenly flashed upon his mind recollection of the modest building in a back street in Manchester where he had daily burrowed and slaved. That was his "own place," and thither he bade the bewildered coachman drive him.

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A new work on Mr. Bouton's table, which porcelain collectors will find of great value, is: "Examples of Early English Pottery. Named, Dated and Inscribed," by John Eliot Hodgkin, F. S. A., and Edith Hodgkin. It forms a handsome volume, beautifully printed, and illustrated with cuts directly reproduced from the original objects, of many rare pieces and numerous inscriptions and signatures.

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One can always find at Mr. Bouton's, by the way, objects of rarity and choice apart from the volumes which are to the book lover a perpetual source of delight. Just now he has, among other items from the Cooke sale in London, two of decided personal interest. One is a superb snuff box, oval in shape, and of the finest amber tortoise shell. It is mounted in gold, and inlaid in gold and silver, and has the initial B engraved upon the rim. The box is one of the many that Byron used and of which he made souvenirs to his friends. A curious miniature represents Lady Hamilton leaning on a shield inscribed "Peace." It is set in gold as a pendant, and has upon the rim the inscription, "Emma, Lady Hamilton." The late Robert Francis Cooke, from whose sale these pieces come, was a partner in the Murray publishing house, and he left a collection rich in manuscripts, books, etc., representing the famous and distinguished persons with whom the house had relations in its time.

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Mr. Bernard Quaritch has written the following characteristic letter *apropos* of certain strictures of Mr. George W. Smalley, which THE COLLECTOR recently quoted from the *Tribune*.

SIR: G. W. S. has a B in his bonnet and a Q in his gizzard. His ability to find sermons in stones and B. Q. in everything must have been acquired in the days when he dwelt in Arden with the Duke—he is terribly fond of Dukes! He tried to make the melancholy Jacques his pattern, but has succeeded only in becoming solemnly tiresome. His London letter of July 13 deals with a costly first-folio Shakspeare sold by Messrs. Dodd & Mead. He reproaches them mournfully for taking a high price. He chides a writer who, in the *Publishers' Weekly*, described the copy as "a really fine one," for making such a statement anonymously. Towards the close of his jeremiad, he drags me in, *à propos de bottles*, by declaring that Mr. Quaritch thinks the bibliophile a poor creature, and delights in deceiving his customers. Lo! in the twinkling of a paragraph, the melancholy Jacques is transformed into Mr. Dick, and B. Q. is, as usual, the head of King Charles. I do not want to insinuate that G. W. S. is in the same case as Mr. Dick. All crockery is not necessarily cracked, but the oracle of the *Tribune* has only himself to blame if we think of delf rather than Delphi. Those who believe in G. W. S. see probably more beauty in an earthen jug than in a porcelain vase.

I love and admire the bibliophile—that is, the true bibliophile—not the poor creature whose only apparatus is the inch measure and the ready reckoner. Indeed, so far as G. W. S. gives us to understand, it would not seem necessary for his kind of bibliophile to know how to read. The bibliographer is another being whose functions are misunderstood by G. W. S. Panzer, for instance, was a great bibliographer, but the men of the G. W. S. school would fail to appreciate him. Better for them the wiseacre who speaks of an *incunabula*, and confines his intellect to studying the accidental size of this or that copy of a book, than the man who describes a book scientifically, according to its editions.

BERNARD QUARITCH.

LONDON, August 4.